

†HEINRICH WAGNER (1923-1988)

With the death of Heinrich Wagner on 11 September of this year we have lost the most outstanding Celtic scholar to have come to us from abroad and to have settled among us. He first came to Ireland in 1945 from his native Zurich where he had received his basic training in Celtic studies under Professor Julius Pokorny. He was then an undergraduate but very soon he embarked on a comprehensive study of Irish speech which led him to visit Gaeltacht areas and, in due course, other areas where Irish had ceased to be in normal use but where a few native Irish speakers were still to be found. His initiation into Gaeltacht speech began in Dunquin in Co. Kerry where he arrived in December 1945 and where he stayed for nearly five months during which he became familiar with the dialect and transcribed a large corpus of material from older speakers including Peig Sayers (published in 1983 by the Institute of Irish Studies in Belfast under the title *Oral Literature from Dunquin, Co. Kerry*). He next went to Teileann in Co. Donegal where he spent long periods between 1946 and 1948 which resulted in the publication of *Gaeilge Theilinn* in 1959.

In the meantime, while attending the Sixth International Congress of Linguists in Paris in 1948, Wagner discussed with the late Professor Gerard Murphy and myself the possibility of compiling an Irish linguistic atlas, and before the end of that year he had prepared for publication his article 'An Irish Linguistic Atlas' (*Éigse* vi. 23-33) in which he pointed the way for the task which, in effect, he had decided to undertake and which resulted in the four volumes of the *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects* (1958-1969), published by the Dublin Institute, and the supplementary material published elsewhere.

In the 'Réamh-rádh' to *Gaeilge Theilinn* Wagner stated that the decision that he should write that book in Irish was made by Comhaltas Uladh which had given him a grant. In fact in the forty years that followed the completion of his Donegal field-work, Irish was the language favoured by him in conversing with most of his colleagues. During those years he revealed himself in his teaching and in his writings as an expert in many areas apart from Irish and the many appointments held by him bear testimony to this fact: Professor of Germanic Philology in the University of Utrecht 1951, and in the University of Basel 1953, Professor of Celtic and Comparative Philology in the Queen's University of Belfast 1958, and Professor in the School of Celtic Studies in the Dublin Institute 1979. In 1986 he was appointed Honorary Professor in the subject of Irish in the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth. Following the death of Pokorny he became one of the editors of *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* in 1970 and his contributions to that periodical were

many and varied over the years.

In the light of Wagner's interest in philology and dialectal studies it is not surprising that a notable number of the students whom he trained during his tenure of the Chair in Belfast followed him into those fields in one or other of the Celtic languages. They benefited from his knowledge and experience and he gained the advantage of having young scholars ready to help him in the preparation of various works for publication and in extending the scope of the dialectal studies which he had initiated, not only in Irish but also in Manx and Breton. After he joined the staff of the Dublin Institute his role as teacher diminished but he continued his collaboration in dialect studies with scholars outside the School and also his editorial work on *ZCP*. His lecturing activity within the School included Statutory Lectures in 1979 and 1984, courses in the Summer Schools in 1981, 1984 and 1987, as well as seminars and talks at most of our annual symposia.

At the time of his appointment in the School Heinrich Wagner had announced his intention of writing 'A Comparative Grammar of the Celtic Languages' but his manifold other activities – which resulted in a steady flow of articles on a wide range of topics – seem to have kept him from doing little more than some preparatory work for this. Hence it is possible that his *Das Hethitische vom Standpunkte der typologischen Sprachgeographie*, published in Pisa in 1985, will have been his last major work on comparative philology, taking its place beside *Das Verbum in den Sprachen der britischen Inseln* which was published as long ago as 1959.

Do thuill Heinrich meas i gceantracha Gaeltachta agus i measc scoláirthe agus eile ar fuaid na hÉireann. Is fada a mhairfidh a chlú agus a chuimhne i mbaile agus i gcéin.

BRIAN Ó CUÍV